

VAGUE FEAR INSPIRED BY MRS. HALL IN HEART OF CHARLOTTE AS CHILD

Patronizing Airs Of Rector's Wife Galled Children

In "My Story" Charlotte Mills, after four years of silent suffering, bares her heart. She sketches the ominous background of the famous Hall-Mills murder mystery and follows the twisted threads of fate which led up to it. She has told how her ambitious mother, apparently doomed to poverty by her unfortunate marriage, turns to the church for consolation, and there meets the Rev. Hall and comes to love him. Today she reveals her childhood reactions to the stern personality of Mrs. Hall, widow of the rector, who is now under bail in connection with the double murder of Mrs. Eleanor Mills and the Rev. Edward Hall.

My Own Story of My Mother's Love and Murder

LOVE AND TEARS

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People wonder, perhaps, just what my feeling was toward Mrs. Hall.

Mrs. Hall is the kind of lady it is hard to have any feeling toward. I could never think of Mrs. Hall as a person with red blood and warm impulses or emotions or anything like that. She must have feelings, of course; every one has, and once I saw her cry. But even then I can't remember having a pang over it, as my chum did.

It happened when my chum and I were in Mrs. Hall's Sunday school class. She always taught in the Sunday school, and even after this awful thing happened she went right on. We never could get interested in anything she said. There seemed to be no heart in it. She couldn't put things so you could care about them.

We used to think of everything on earth but what she was reading or saying to us. She simply didn't have a "way" with children or young people—which was no fault of hers, just a misfortune.

There was a big stained glass window right opposite where we sat in Sunday school, with a life-size figure of Moses dressed in colored robes and sandals, and while Mrs. Hall would be reading about St. Paul and St. Peter I would be trying to draw pictures of Moses. Sometimes I got him pretty well, every feature and fold of his clothes, and each Sunday I would try and improve on it. I remember I always had a hard time with his feet and hands.

Lessons Torture

But that is what I was thinking of, not the Sunday school lesson, and all the others in the class were the same way. It was simply torture to sit there.

Well, one time Mrs. Hall wanted to give a pageant. It was religious, and all the countries were to be represented. My chum was to be Japan and I was to represent China, which I didn't particularly care for because my costume was to be made out of burlap! When the time for rehearsal came not a soul showed up. Mrs. Hall came to an empty room.

It was terrible of us, but that is

how we felt about it. When we saw Mrs. Hall the next day she said how disappointed and humiliated she felt, and she cried. My chum was sorry and tried to say something. Some of the others said they were willing to come and work at rehearsals.

But I was as hard as nails and made no apology at all. I knew I ought to, but I couldn't open my mouth.

The pageant never was given.

Always Left One Cold

I only tell this to illustrate how Mrs. Hall affected me and a good many others, too. We just couldn't feel for her, or towards her, no matter what the circumstances were. I am sure she meant to be nice and that she was very good and kind in her way. But she never got under your skin; always left you cold.

She couldn't be any different, I suppose, and I feel sorry for anybody who has that manner. The only friends they have are people who belong to them or want something from them.

The Sunday school teacher we had the year before having been a totally different type, it made us girls even less inclined to love our new instructor. I regret to say that we drew comparisons, not realizing, I suppose, that a person has to be whatever their nature makes them. The other teacher used to bring us slices of chocolate cake wrapped in waxed paper, and at Christmas, Easter and New Year's gave us little presents—handkerchiefs with a flapper painted on one corner, or some cute thing.

She would take us on hikes and to pick flowers in daisy fields, and she used to tell us travel-stories and all sorts of interesting things sandwiched in between Bible lessons. We used to wonder why Mrs. Hall didn't follow the same method, and we got as mad as hops when she gave us pamphlets on "Loving Your Neighbor" and "Be Kind to Dumb Animals" and "Steps to the Altar." We used to wish she would give us a ten-cent handkerchief or string of beads instead.

We were always half afraid of her. I think all the church people felt that way, she was so distant and stiff and formal. She didn't mean to be patronizing, I guess, but we all felt we were being stooped down to. The only enthusiasm she ever had was a sort of religious fervor.

Personally, I like people to have feeling and enthusiasm, even if they are wrong and make all kinds of mistakes. Mother was that sort, and so was Mr. Hall. Mother had a temper, all right, but seldom showed it unless she was driven too far, and even then she only showed fight when she was sure she was right.

I remember how she sometimes fought our battles for us when Dan and I were little.

Wouldn't Be Scared

At home, once in a while she would blurt out what she felt to father. And always, once she knew she was right, she would stick up for herself and you could not scare her into keeping still, no matter what.

In those days father used to complain about her going to the church so much. He'd ask why she couldn't let the other ladies do more of the work and not be running up there the whole time. Mother would always answer:—

"The church is all I've got. It's my whole life and I won't give it up for anything or anybody. I shall go as often as I can."

But she never neglected her home. Only on Sundays, after she began to sing in the choir, she wouldn't get home till quite late, because they had to go into the vestry to take off their surplices, and the choir singers were naturally

later getting away than the congregation.

Mother would always prepare the things for dinner before she went in the morning, but she had to finish them up when she came back, and it made dinner pretty late—around 3 o'clock sometimes.

Dad Complained

Dad didn't like that and said so. Then mother told him that if he couldn't wait that long, he should put the gas on under the pots and pans himself and get dinner started. He did, too. For a long time father got Sunday dinner—for himself, that is—and would eat

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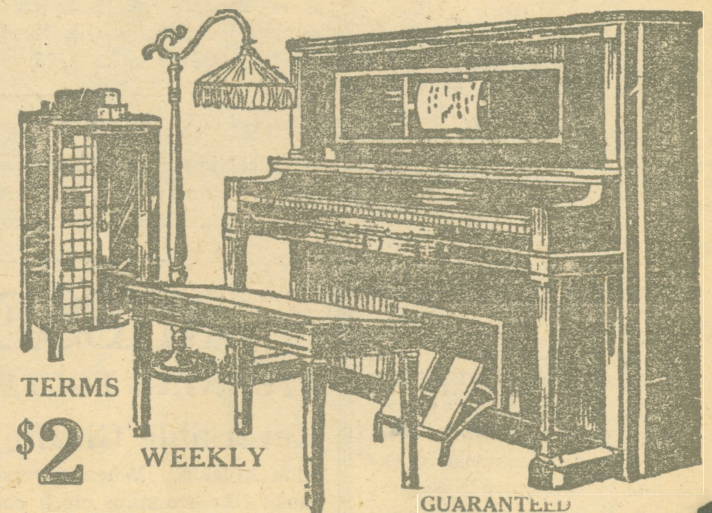
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